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## THE DONG WORLD: A PROPOSAL FOR ANALYZING THE HIGHLANDS BETWEEN THE YANGZI VALLEY AND THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN LOWLANDS

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### ABSTRACT

We propose the concept of a Dong World, a mountainous territory lying south of the Yangzi valley and north of the lowlands of mainland Southeast Asia. In the highland valleys (*dong*) across this rugged terrain with its upland peoples, there emerged multiple communities based on wet rice agriculture and led by their chieftains. Much local rivalry, as well as conflict with more distant external powers, resulted among these chieftains. Using archaeological studies, Chinese texts, and other recent texts, we follow the history of the Dong World from the early last millennium BCE to the present day. We also establish a distinct periodization in this world's development. After the dominance of the Nanzhao realm (seventh-ninth centuries CE) and of Dali (tenth to thirteenth centuries), came the Mongol invasions and Ming (1368-1644) dominance, which split this world into its northern (Chinese) and southern (Southeast Asian) sectors. Since the early eighteenth century, lowland states (China, Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam) have carved out their pieces of this world, first with indirect rule (for China, *tusi*) before switching to direct rule (for China, *gaitu guiliu*) where possible. The result today is a world increasingly forced to cope with and benefit from external political and economic demands. The inhabitants of the *dong* communities are also in the process of accepting, rejecting, and/or accommodating these demands.

### KEYWORDS

chiefdoms, China, Dali, Dong communities, highland history, mountain trade and communications, Nanzhao, Southeast Asia

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<sup>1</sup> This proposal is derived from our work in Anderson and Whitmore (2015). Our great thanks go to four anonymous reviewers who helped us sharpen the focus of our concept and to a close reading by Henry Wright. We have incorporated their thoughts into our investigations.

Many scholars and others have dealt with a multitude of parts within the mountainous region lying between the Yangzi Valley and the lowlands of mainland Southeast Asia, but few have considered the whole.<sup>1</sup> We join Jean Michaud (2006:149) in believing that "... all these different segments [of this mountain region] could be reconnected to form a meaningful, though far from uniform, physical, historical, social, and cultural space." While, as he himself noted (McKinnon and Michaud 2000:2), "only the fool" would try such an endeavor, what we wish to suggest is a "meta" approach in which we conceive of this highland world, spanning what is commonly perceived by the modern world as divided between China and Southeast Asia, instead as a single physical, socio-cultural, and political entity. Ours is not an effort to join any particular discourse (others may do that), but to construct from the ground up a specific concept for this particular region. This proposal is meant to be an abstracted sketch of the region as derived initially from the essays in our edited volume, *China's Encounters on the South and Southwest* (Anderson and Whitmore 2015). The latter contains the specifics from which our concept arose. As a sketch, this essay is not meant to be all-inclusive (such requires another book), and we hope others will help us fill out the world we are describing.

This world has existed into the modern age and has only in recent centuries begun to be pulled apart by the expanding lowland state forces of surrounding nations. By treating this world as

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<sup>1</sup> Other designations for the entire mountain region and beyond include Zomia, Southeast Asian Massif, and Indo-Chinese massif. Zomia, employed by James C Scott (2009; 2016), has engendered much discussion over its external statist orientation, and we are content to leave it to that broader discourse. As for the Southeast Asian Massif, put forward by Jean Michaud (Michaud 2000; 2006; 2009; Forsyth and Michaud 2011; Turner et al. 2015), we believe, first, that it relates to a generalized physical description of the land, where our proposed concept is socio-political as well as physical; and, second, that this region is not part of Southeast Asia, but a separate entity, active in its own right and apart from, but influencing and influenced by both China and Southeast Asia. We feel that this term disregards the precise terrain characteristics of this region, as well as the deep historical connections between this region and dominant lowland peoples. This critique also holds for the Indo-Chinese massif (Robinne and Sadan 2007).

fundamentally autonomous and pursuing its own agency vis-à-vis the encroaching lowland forces, we gain a better perception of the actors involved and their shifting intentions. Pursuing the great variety of local agents within this world as they dealt with their immediate neighbors as well as with their distant antagonists, we see the contingencies and the personalities that have helped shape this world we know today. In this, we follow Hjorleifur Jonsson's (2014:24) call for the recognition of "negotiation and the mutual reliance or benefit" among these groups.

In this paper, we present our concept of the Dong World, that highlands area stretching from the Yangzi Valley to the Southeast Asian lowlands, from the hills of southeast coastal China to the eastern edges of the Tibetan Plateau.<sup>1</sup> This territory, centered on the Nanzhao/Dali/Yunnan Plateau, beneath the upland slopes, is made up of highland river valleys and the communities that live within them. In Tai languages, such a valley is a *djong*; which Catherine Churchman (2016:100) describes as "a mountain valley or level ground between cliffs beside a stream." Eventually seen by the Chinese as a political unit, the term became sinicized as *dong* 'mountain valley community' (often mistranslated as 'grotto/cave') with its chieftain.<sup>2</sup> We choose this Tai/Chinese term for this world, given how it reflects the core nature of the region. Herein we ask: What was its physical nature?

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<sup>1</sup> We first developed this concept in Anderson and Whitmore (2015:14-19). Yao (2016:111-112) and Michaud (2006:5) also discuss this region and include the Sichuan territory. Michaud goes farther south in Southeast Asia as well.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the meaning of the term *dong*, see Churchman (2015:65, nn 19-20) and Baldanza (2015:171-172, nn 10-11); see also Baldanza (2016:122-123); Churchman (2016:100, 118, nn 1-2); Hargett (2010 [1170s]:li-lii); and Faure 2007:46-47). In the western Tibeto-Burman regions of the Dong World, the term for such "intramontane basins" is *bazi*; see Yao (2016:7-8); Harrell (2001:61); Wang (1997:41-42); and Yang (1997:270-71). Yang (2008:25-26, 148, 151, <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/yang/>, accessed 16 July 2016) speaks of "small fertile basins and valleys." Perhaps related to *djong/dong* is the eastern Zhuang ethnonym *cuengh/tsuengh* (Holm 2003:8-11, map p 10). The latter term appears in a region of early Han contact and may have been sinicized to *dong*.

Who were the peoples within it? What socio-economic pattern did these peoples develop? How did their political form come about? How did local power interact with external, particularly state, power?

## MOUNTAINS AND STREAMS

The physical nature of this world emerged when the Indian subcontinent collided with the Eurasian landmass causing the great uplift of the Tibetan Plateau.<sup>1</sup> On the eastern edge of this high plateau, the highlands descend in a step-down fashion all the way to what became the southeast coast of China. In height, this territory slopes down from the peak of Mt. Everest to sea level, the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau descends west-to-east from 7,000 feet to 4,000 and then on down to the coastal plains. Water and its flow have carved these heights into a series of river valleys and ridges, created by tectonic block faulting, to the east and the south, though only about one-tenth of this terrain is plateau/basin (*dong*) land. The streams here include the great rivers of the Yangzi, the Red (Hòng), the Mekong, the Salween, and the Irrawaddy, with numerous other streams in the watersheds amid these major rivers.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Marks (1998:24-44, 46-47, 52) describes the Lingnan 'South of the Passes' region on the east (downstream) of the Dong World as an area of limestone raised by the tectonic uplift to its west, forming an east-west mountain range that lies between the Guizhou Plateau and the Guangxi Basin. On the south are mountains that lead to present-day Vietnam, enclosing the Basin at a height of about 1,000 feet. The Basin's western edge rises sharply up to the Yao Hills and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. With the plentiful monsoon rains in the summer months, streams have carved their paths sharply through the

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<sup>1</sup> Indian Uplift (2015); Molnar (2015:89-105); Molnar and Stock (2009:1-11, figs 1-2); and Sigley (2016:184-186). Also see the map in Yao (2016:109).

<sup>2</sup> Miller (1994a:[2]-4); Higham (1996:137, map 5.1). For a look at ridges and valleys of the Dong World from the perspective of the highest eastern Himalayan peak (within northern Myanmar), see Jenkins (2015:60-91).

mountainous terrain. The upland valleys (*dong*) receive plentiful water both from the skies and from upstream. The flows change dramatically throughout the year and between years, cutting into this terrain. The result has been the valley (*dong*) lands scattered among the ridges. Travel, by both land and water, required patience and effort, and depended on the time of year. Seasonal flooding deposited silt into these limited valley spaces, creating fertile soil therein. Surrounded by thick forests on the slopes, these *dong* were rich pockets of agricultural land separated by the steep upland ridges with their great variety of flourishing flora and fauna.

Here, the streams worked their way through the limestone regions, creating the spectacular karst topography and the mountain valleys, the *dong*.<sup>1</sup> We are led, in the words of Mark Elvin (2004:216), "... into a subtropical labyrinth of mountains and plunging river valleys. Snakes, monkeys, tigers, deer, and many other animals and birds flourished in its forests."<sup>2</sup> To the south, one goes down the Great Descent (in Marco Polo's phrase) into the territory of the southwest monsoon, much warmer and wetter than up on the Plateau. As Rhoads Murphey (1994:62) noted from his time in Yunnan during the 1940s:

... one entered the monsoon rain forest, ... a new kind of world ..., through torrential downpours, oceans of mud, and almost frighteningly luxurious vegetation at all levels, ... wild orchids, plus occasional elephants and tigers.

Within the highland river valleys stretching off the Plateau, to both the east and the south, there emerged the agricultural communities of the *dong* that form the center of our proposed narrative. Above them, on the upland mountain slopes there existed other communities that

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<sup>1</sup> The Zhuang on the eastern edge of the Dong World differentiate among large valleys, small valleys, and tiny karst hollows (Holm 2003:13).

<sup>2</sup> See also Weinstein (2014:15). These four animals are the remnants of a much different fauna (including elephants, wild water buffalo, apes such as gibbons and larger primates, and giant pandas) that disappeared by the second millennium CE (Henry Wright, personal communication, 11 November 2016).

interacted, economically, socially, culturally, and politically, with those in the mountain valleys (See Fig. 1).

### *DONG 'MOUNTAIN VALLEY COMMUNITIES'*

Speaking in general terms, the original ethno-linguistic pattern of the Dong World seems to have taken this form: on its western side, Tibeto-Burman; on its north, Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien); on its east, in the Yue world of the Chinese, the Tai; and on the south, Mon-Khmer (such as the Wa). Through the centuries, the latter seem to have remained fairly stationary. At the same time, elements of the other three groups were in motion (possibly due to Chinese pressures from the north) as the Tibeto-Burmans moved south and southwest (some going down into the lowlands that would become Burma/Myanmar); the Miao-Yao moved south (eventually some into the high mountains of present-day northern mainland Southeast Asia); and the Tai pushed southwest and west (through northern Vietnam into areas of today's Yunnan, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, and Assam).<sup>1</sup> Overall, we believe that it has been not culture (ethnicity), but adaptation to ecology that has mattered in the Dong World. Yet, over the first millennium CE, it appears that Tibeto-Burman groups were most active and powerful, while Tai communities took the upper hand from the beginning of the second millennium. The Mongol incursion, followed by the Ming, tamped down an already weakened Tibeto-Burman presence and kept the Tai forces on their southern fringe (from the Gulf of Tonkin to the Brahmaputra River). In this way, the Dong World resembles Inner

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Miller (1994b:265-292), especially the map on p. 271; Turner et al. (2015:21, map 2.1); Harrell (2001:62-71, 177); Swope (2011:113, map 6); Marks (1998:53-55); McKinnon and Michaud (2000:2-5 maps); Turner et al. (2015:21 map). Bellwood and Glover (2004:5 map, 9, 11); Bellwood (2004:21-22 map, 24-25); Higham (2004:41-53); Holm (2003:159-160); Gedney (1995); Wang (1997:45-57); and Lee (2015:64-66) are the sources from which the ethnographic information above was obtained. For mid-twentieth century descriptions of these ethno-linguistic groups, see LeBar et al. (1964).

Asia, as its peoples and their wet rice agriculture have moved aggressively out of their environmental zone and into (and had major impacts on) the lowland territories along its flanks, particularly to the south. Like the "conquest dynasties" in China coming out of Inner Asia, descendants of political powers from the Dong World would become rulers in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam.

As indicated above, within this mountain world the stream valleys (*dong*) form only a small percentage of its land mass, perhaps a tenth. The remainder of this world consists of the mountain slopes themselves. On these forested upland slopes, there are (and have been) a great variety of ethnic peoples living predominantly above the stream valleys. These upland peoples and those in the valleys have continued to interact through the centuries, economically, socially, culturally, and politically. Since we consider (and the records reflect) the *dong* as the hubs of these activities, our concept emphasizes these valleys, hence adopting this indigenous term as its name. Where possible, we speak of these upland peoples in relation to the *dong*. We do not consider there to have been a hard line between these peoples, but take an "interactionist" approach (Evrard 2007:159), as Edmund Leach (1954) did, believing that there existed a socio-cultural permeability and flexibility of the peoples above and within the *dong* contingent in certain circumstances.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the complex dynamics between the uplands and the *dong* need to be examined further. Wang (1997:42) has commented for western Yunnan that "The valleys are rich, the hills are poor, and the differentiation is increasing."

As we examine the socio-economic (this section) and political (next section) situations within the Dong World, we begin with archaeological evidence from the prehistoric period<sup>2</sup> before moving to Chinese texts. These texts are specifically Li Daoyuan's (d. 527) *Shui jing zhu* 'Commentary on the Water Classic' of the sixth century CE, Fan Chuo's *Man shu* 'Book of the Southern Barbarians' of the 860s,

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<sup>1</sup> For discussions of Leach's work, see Wang (1997:11-34) and Robinne and Sadan (2007).

<sup>2</sup> Yao (2016).

and the writings of Fan Chengda and Zhou Qufei in the 1170s.<sup>1</sup> Thus, starting with an interior material view from the excavations, we utilize external texts to understand the human nature of the Dong World. The authors of these texts each had contact with the peoples they described. The commentator of the *Shui jing zhu* reflects the minimal contact of the post-Han<sup>2</sup> era in the far southwest where Fan Chuo served in the southern Tang<sup>3</sup> Protectorate of Annan (the Red [Hòng] River delta) during the western Nanzhao invasions of the 860s and where Fan Chengda and Zhou Qufei were provincial officials in the Song<sup>4</sup> southern province of Guangxi amongst the eastern *dong* communities during the 1170s.

In the last millennium BCE, the mountain valleys of the Dong World saw communities form along its streams and up its slopes. The plateau beyond Chengdu in modern-day Sichuan would become the cultural and political center of the Shu Kingdom, the eastern riverine valley region surrounding modern-day Chongqing would be the center of the Ba Kingdom, and the areas to the northwest and south of these centers would be the lands of the *xinan yi* 'southwestern barbarians'.<sup>5</sup> As Alice Yao describes these latter valleys, they had four zones: the flood plains of the streams, lower terraces and foothills, upland slopes, and side valleys. Through these centuries, the *dong* communities grew rice on the valley floors, up the slopes, and in the side valleys. Their graves had meat, grain, and liquid containers. The degree of their prosperity and power would have depended mainly on the space, large or small, accessible for agriculture.<sup>6</sup> They would also have developed exchange relations with peoples higher up the slopes and in adjacent, and eventually distant, valleys. Excavations indicate significant populations during the period in at least some of the valleys, as

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor (1995), Li (1936 [6<sup>th</sup> c.]), Fan Ch'o (1961[860s]), and Fan Chengda (2010[1070s]).

<sup>2</sup> The Han Dynasty lasted from 206 BCE to 220 CE.

<sup>3</sup> The Tang Dynasty lasted from 618 CE to 907.

<sup>4</sup> The Song Dynasty lasted from 960 to 1279.

<sup>5</sup> He (2011:220).

<sup>6</sup> This can be seen in today's Zhuang conceptions of agriculture in the large and small valleys and the hollows (Holm 2003:15).



interrelated settlements emerged in well-spaced patterns with social differentiation. As these varied communities took shape, based on the mound burials of their ancestors, leadership emerged and chiefdoms appeared with the development of power and authority. With the chiefdoms came territorial conflict that is well documented in the centuries after 700 BCE. In Yao's terms (2016:104), the "fertile basins and key communication corridors" through this mountainous terrain became prime zones for this competition as the communities' sense of themselves grew and consolidated. These *dong* settlements, in their local variety, show different patterns in the eastern, central, and western sectors of the Dong World.<sup>1</sup>

Through the middle of this last millennium BCE, the pattern of local power and competition among the *dong* communities continued as they maintained their ritual burials, generation after generation. As Yao (2016:108) notes, "regional political processes" involving both exchange and strife took hold with the *dong* communities increasingly forming inter-valley networks. This led to the growth of trade links and the movement of prized objects along them and in particular, early bronze drums (with local design variations) signifying chiefly wealth and power.<sup>2</sup> Valleys large and small across the Dong World witnessed this. In such a way, the *dong* communities proceeded to grow both agriculturally and through commerce; some more, some less depending on the size of their valleys and their proximity to the growing interregional trade routes, particularly north-south. This was, in Yao's (2016:126) terms, "a new expanding regional network connecting remote highlands in the upper Jinsha River (2,600-3,000 meters above sea level) corridor to the low-lying alluvial valleys extending into [modern] Vietnam." She sees here (2016:129) what Edmund Leach (1954) saw in the Kachin Hills of Myanmar over sixty years ago, as Yao notes, "a simultaneous process of social segmentation

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<sup>1</sup> Yao (2016:ch 3).

<sup>2</sup> For the growing discussion of bronze drums, see Yao (2016:108-174 passim, 226-230); Churchman (2011/2013:74-81; 2015:61-63, 67, 73-74; 2016:ch 1 and passim), and Li (2011/2013:45-48). Sprenger (2007:166-168) and Holm (2003:15) provide excellent examples of recent bronze drum usage.

and class stratification," as the burial mounds grew to be visible monuments.

Out of this pattern rose the Dian society in the Kunming plain during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE as its widespread influences moved across the mountain valleys. The chiefs of these *dong* communities came to interact and to compete much more with each other as the scale of wealth and artifacts rose considerably and the regional pattern grew stronger. Cowries from the Bay of Bengal became part of this inter-valley system, and the manufacture of the drums proceeded to be more elaborate, as Yao (2016:138) says, "for display and narration." The new drum form spread throughout the Dong World, especially down the Red (Hồng) River. Agriculture and textile production (linked to women) formed the economic basis, as trade grew within the Dong World and beyond it.<sup>1</sup>

With the initial entrance of the Chinese (Han Dynasty) political power into the Dong World over the third and second centuries BCE, the local *dong* communities acted to maintain their autonomy in the face of imperial demands and enticements. Economic penetration of the Dong World increased, and the Dian society of the Kunming plain showed ever-greater social differentiation. The horseman appeared as a marker of status and with him the raising of horses. In later centuries, horses would become the most important commodity to pass through the Dong World. Settlements continued to grow in the valleys and on their slopes, with the main ones lying along the streams in the center of the valleys. Artisans developed vigorously as iron working joined bronze. Overall, a distinct differentiation occurred among the *dong* communities depending on their resource control as well as between them and the upland peoples.<sup>2</sup>

Han political control in the late second century BCE followed existing trade routes, and their bestowal of titles and seals defined the social and political structure of nearby *dong* societies in Han terms. Moving particularly into the eastern portion of the Dong World, the Han declared the region their province of Yizhou, while adapting their

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<sup>1</sup> Yao (2016:chs 4-5) and Higham (1996:chs 5, 9).

<sup>2</sup> Yao (2016:167-181).

contact to, in Yao's (2016:182) words, "existing [indigenous] territories and networks ... rel[ying] on local elites to negotiate cooperation among native subjects..." This meant that local societies allied themselves with the newly intrusive power where they did not actively resist it. Over the last century BCE, Han military strength subdued such outbreaks. Still the indigenous social structure remained, both affected by Han pressures and relied upon by the Chinese in their efforts at controlling them. As seen in Han coins and brick tombs, communities of the Dong World, in dealing with this presence and lowland influx, had unprecedented contact with the outside world. Yet many of these communities in their scattered mountain valleys and up the slopes had little direct involvement with the Han and continued their internal evolution. Within the Han province on the east, especially along the trade routes and in the major valleys (Kunming, Dali, etc.), there was significant impact as Chinese prestige goods entered the region, especially on the local elites and consequently the social hierarchy. Walled settlements sprang up there during this period. Yet, however entangled they were with the Han framework, the *dong* societies maintained a cultural continuity, and outside the limited areas of the Han administrative centers and their direct contact with local communities, the *dong* peoples continued in their bare feet and houses on stilts (as the Chinese viewed them).<sup>1</sup>

The Han disruption of *dong* communities at major locations, especially in the east, left the many river valleys of the mountains oriented to a greater or lesser degree to the new social and economic patterns. Through the first centuries CE and with the disappearance of the Han presence (along with their dynasty) in the third century, the *dong* communities emerged in a scattered and looser relationship with each other. The Cuan Clan<sup>2</sup> in the eastern sector of the Dong World, the region most affected by Han penetration, was strongly influenced

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<sup>1</sup> Yao (2016:182-214) and Henry Wright (personal communication, 11 November 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The Cuan formed the Nanzhong daxing 'Great Clan of Nanzhong' in an area comprised of China's modern-day southern Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan provinces.

by the Han presence, but was once again re-rooted in its mountain valleys. Hierarchy in the Dong World tended to be interrelated with the degree of external contact and exposure, specifically regarding locations in the mountains relative to the communication routes. Using both archaeological works and Chinese texts, Churchman (2011/2013; 2015; 2016) takes us to the far eastern side of the Dong World in these centuries. Here, on the edge of the mountain territory, *dong* communities benefited from their external contacts, both in status and in wealth, and manipulated the routes through their valley territories to their advantage. In addition, local production of precious metals, including copper and gold (in Guangxi and Cao Bằng), and forest products enriched these *dong* communities further. Building on their indigenous culture, these local societies gained from this wealth available to them. One result was that their bronze drums were locally produced with their own style of manufacture and distinctive design patterns, utilizing both their own copper and Chinese cash. All this existed on the wet rice agricultural base of the *dong* and their mountain streams.<sup>1</sup>

But the Chinese of these centuries retained little sense of the Dong World. Here we turn mainly to the Chinese texts. In the sixth century, Li Daoyuan compiled his *zhu* 'commentary' on the earlier *Shui jing* 'Water Classic' (third century CE). Looking at the river systems of this mountainous region as the Chinese perceived them, Li sought to describe the peoples there, reaching back to tropes employed by earlier chroniclers such as the scholar, Sima Qian (145-86 BCE). These peoples all appeared quite mysterious, and Li could only conceive of them in terms of magic and danger. Supernatural forces in animal form had power that humans had to appease and try to bring into their own hierarchy. This situation reflects the constant lowland/highland struggle. Avoiding such co-optation and standing apart from the lowland structure, the spirits (and the peoples) stubbornly insisted on their own ways of life. This Chinese view mainly concerned the eastern segment of the Dong World in which they saw scattered settlements

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<sup>1</sup> Yao (2016:ch 7) and Churchman (2011/2013:74-78; 2015:61-67; 2016:ch 6).

with chiefs who were "arrogant and licentious" (Taylor 1995:33) attacking the lowlands. They sat astride a trade route to India. At best, these mountain peoples would guard the frontier for the Chinese. Beyond this eastern sector lay territory even less known, far beyond Chinese knowledge and influence, none of it deserving any great degree of Chinese attention.<sup>1</sup>

Three centuries later, the situation in the Dong World and the Chinese knowledge of it had changed completely. The *Man shu* 'Book of the Southern Barbarians' appeared in the late ninth century, written by Fan Chuo, an official in the Annan Protectorate of the Tang Dynasty (in the lower Red [Hồng]) River) during the 860s. Having had direct contact with invaders out of the Dong World (Nanzhao), Fan provided extensive detail on both the western and eastern sectors of this area that was now of great interest to the Chinese. He described a region made up of *chuan dong* 'stream valley communities' or just *chuan* 'streams'. Indeed, this book is a detailed examination of the many *chuan* and their interactions.

These multiple *chuan dong* were settlements based on wet rice cultivation, many of which were linked to trade routes through the mountains and over the passes. They were constantly competing and fighting with each other. Led by their chiefs (*guizhu* 'Spirit Lords')<sup>2</sup> and protected by the fierce topography, climate, and wildlife, these *chuan dong* communities flourished in their highland valleys. The *Man shu* described them in these terms: cultivating wet rice in their irrigated fields (the soil being "rich and fertile" [Fan Ch'o 1961 [860s]:18, 53]), living in houses on stilts above their animals and surrounded by gardens, and growing millet, barley, and wheat between the rice harvests or up the slopes. Sources of salt were important, and a variety of fruits grew in the valleys and the mountainsides. Woods and bamboos were plentiful. Access to precious metals and horses provided wealth, as did the forest products and the commerce along

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor (1995).

<sup>2</sup> Where the translators of the *Man shu* used the term "Devil Lord" for *guizhu* and Churchman and Backus employed "spirit master," we prefer the more political term "Spirit Lord."

the routes throughout the Dong World. The Chinese noted that everyone in these *dong* communities went barefoot and wore felt with locally-distinctive headgear. These were ranked societies with sumptuary rules, from the farmers to the chiefs ("Spirit Lords") on up to the Great Spirit Lord himself, the Meng Clan of Nanzhao (see below). All adult males served in military operations, equipped with rhinoceros hide shields, bamboo spears, and especially prized Nanzhao swords. Overall, Chinese influences appeared, particularly in the eastern sector. The latter buried their dead, where the western sector cremated theirs (an undoubtedly Buddhist influence).<sup>1</sup>

Three centuries later, back on the eastern edge of the Dong World during the 1170s, two regular Chinese provincial officials in Guangxi province, Fan Chengda and Zhou Qufei, provide us with a description of the *dong* communities there.<sup>2</sup> Theirs was the last major description of the Dong World before the Mongol invasions less than a century later, beginning in the 1250s. These officials began with the rugged topography, the precipices and caverns in the limestone karst countryside, and proceeded to give a detailed account of the great variety of fauna and flora across this mountain landscape. In an age of decreased political threat, the officials explicitly pointed out that the peoples there formed a lesser part of this grand landscape in their *dong* communities. These communities were predominantly Tai, led by clans named Nong and Huang,<sup>3</sup> Mo and Wang. Presenting them as "fierce and ferocious ... preposterous and strange" (Fan Chengda 2010 [1170s]:150, 161), the officials once again depict the *dong* communities as growing rice together with a great variety of garden produce, fruit trees in their valleys, and gathering other resources in the mountains surrounding them. Living in their houses on stilts above their many animals, these peoples also manufactured goods and took part in trade, dealing in horses and metals. They dressed in felt, but now at least

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<sup>1</sup> Fan Ch'o (1961 [860s]:67-82). These economies had, together with millet and barley, various tree and root crops as key elements in their agriculture (Henry Wright personal communication, 11 November 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Fan Chengda (2010 [1170s]:ch 13).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the Huang Clan, see Anderson (2014).

some had footgear. Social structure was local with the chiefs, elites, farmers, and war captives. Local military forces entrusted with the defense of the region were armed with shields, crossbows, spears, and swords.

Unlike Fan Chuo, these two officials also mentioned upland peoples in the mountains above the valleys. Those in the northern region of the Dong World, called Yao, were less economically stable in their upland fields, even coupled with hunting and gathering, and thus posed a threat to those in the valleys.<sup>1</sup> Raiding and trade (in mountain products for salt and rice) sustained them. On the slopes to the south, generally beyond Chinese knowledge, were peoples called mountain Lao (no relation to the present Lao of Laos) hunting and gathering with some control over the horse trade routes. As with the earlier *Shui jing zhu*, fantastic tales enveloped these upland peoples. And looking westward beyond these territories stretching to Tibet lay the *dong* communities of the "true Southern Barbarians" (Fan Chengda 2010 [1070s]:182), still barefoot. Despite a general ignorance of the area Fan Chuo had described in such detail, these two officials did recognize the autonomy of the societies there. The horse trade was quite important, and all carried swords, with those from Dali (the old Nanzhao) especially valued.

While these *dong* communities appeared distant and isolated from the lowlands, they would, as Richard O'Connor (1995:968-96) pointed out, have an immense impact on the societies and economies of mainland Southeast Asia. He argues that out of the highland *dong* valleys it seems there came an "agro-culture" system of irrigated wet rice that emerged into the lowlands of the Irrawaddy, Chao Phraya, Mekong, and Red Rivers. Within the mountain valleys, the people (Tai, Tibeto-Burman) had developed irrigated wet rice agriculture by manipulating the rapid flow of the valley streams (the *chuan*, as the *Man shu* called them). With the agricultural system, there came concomitant ritual and ethnic change, as the new system drew other peoples into it. In this way, O'Connor argues, peoples either within or immediately adjacent to the Dong World (Burmans, Thai, and

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<sup>1</sup> Fan Chengda (2010 [1170s]:171-79) and Faure (2007:46-47).

Vietnamese) brought this agro-cultural system with its weirs and water control onto the plains of their major river valleys. There, they established socio-economic systems on this agricultural and ritual basis, which were able to overcome the tank agro-cultural systems of the existing Pyu, Mon, Khmer, and Cham peoples to their south. Thereby, the socio-economic patterns forming within the *dong* valleys led to more efficient and productive forms than had developed in the lowlands of the Southeast Asian mainland. Led by their chieftains, these *dong* societies became cooperative and structured, bringing change to the lowland communities in the process.

#### CHIEFDOMS<sup>1</sup>

Among the multitude of *dong* communities scattered across the mountain terrain of this world, what political relations existed within and between them? Based on the wet rice production of their valleys, large and small, supplemented by trade, the strength of these communities depended on both the extent of their resources, human and material, and the human capability of forging relations/alliances with, or dominating, other communities.

As the socio-economic nature of the Dong World continued through the centuries, affected to some degree by trade and contact with the external lowlands, its political structure changed with the ebb and flow of encroaching state power from surrounding regions. The rise of chiefdoms with their bronze drums in the *dong* communities emerged from the mountain valleys and culminated in the great lordships of Nanzhao and Dali. Through the last millennium BCE, per Alice Yao's study of excavated local cemeteries, there occurred "a new political time" (2016:103). She sees in the first half of the millennium the formation of *dong* communities with the "emergent territorial politics" (2016:20) and competition. This was followed by the rise of

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term 'chiefdoms' here simply for local polities centered in the many *dong*. They formed the building blocks for the larger lordships and realms linking numerous *dong*.



the bronze drum chiefdoms in the fifth to third centuries BCE as trade involving both valleys and upland slopes brought wealth to the valleys. This culminated during the third century BCE with the Dian lordship before the Han Dynasty pressure brought Chinese domination to the eastern sector of the Dong World. At this point, *dong* chieftains utilized Han contacts to strengthen their positions locally.<sup>1</sup> A corresponding Han court campaign to extend direct communications into the Dong World through extensive road building failed due to excessive costs, and most areas of the Dian kingdom remained beyond direct Han contact.<sup>2</sup>

With the growth of the *dong* communities in the stream valleys among the mountains, the graves reveal in the early centuries the rise of the chiefs and, in Yao's words (2016:103), "war and territorial battles" among the valleys throughout the Dong World. Warriors became significant with the thriving competition across the eastern, central, and western territories, with no one valley dominating. By the middle of the millennium, the bronze culture was developing strongly, and with it, the linking of drums with chiefdoms, from the high valleys to the eastern coastal lowlands. This marked, in Yao's phrase (2016:126), "a different order of political time" as *dong* chiefs raised their status socially as well as politically, utilizing elements from the Sichuan culture to the north. Resources and leadership differentiated these *dong* communities in their power relations. During this "wider political time" (Yao 2016:131), there arose the Dian lordship in the Kunming plain which came to dominate the eastern sector of the Dong World by the third century BCE, taking advantage of the flow of goods along the mountain routes and controlling the chiefdoms' access to it.

This Dian realm consisted of alliances and control among the *dong* communities as its influence spread, setting the stylistic example for ritual and ceremony for the other valleys. Horses and the hunt began to stand out. Local chieftains used their Dian contacts to enhance their own authority. Here we see a great elaboration in the ritual use of bronze drums and cowrie-containing kettles within the

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<sup>1</sup> Yao (2016:20-22).

<sup>2</sup> Yang (2008:ch 3).

Dian lordship, particularly the widespread use of drums. The *dong* chieftains, continuing their local traditions, adhered to the Dian lordship and its patterns. Defining themselves in relation to it, they undoubtedly sharpened their own definitions of themselves.<sup>1</sup>

From the third century BCE into the second century BCE, Qin and Han entrance into this eastern sector of the Dong World strongly affected both the Dian lordship (which eventually disappeared) and the *dong* chieftains. With the Han invasion of 109 BCE, elements of prestige and authority now began to be derived from the Chinese imperial system based in the Kunming plain in the east and extending west to the Dali plain. The *dong* communities generally maintained a continuity with their own pasts, resisting the Chinese effort at cultural domination. But the allure of imperial glory and the friction with its demands motivated and defined the *dong* chieftains' actions, even those in the western Dong World beyond the reach of the Han. Local lords, those of Dian and Pu Han, became allied with the Han court, receiving seals and imperial confirmation of their status. What was, in Yao's (2016:168, 181) phrase, "an upended Bronze Age political time" when "a sense of regionalism was reworked," saw the strengthening of local *dong* chieftains as they became *yishuai* 'barbarian chiefs', adapting to the greater Chinese influence. Iron spears and crossbows came to be major weapons adopted locally, no doubt from locals serving in Chinese armies.<sup>2</sup>

The Han thus allied with the local structure of the mountain valleys. Taking advantage of what the Han imperial system had to offer, *dong* chieftains in this eastern sector (no doubt followed by those in the west) applied the knowledge they gained to consolidate their own local situations. After more than a century of increasing Chinese social and economic presence in the region, a massive rising in 42 CE (at the same time as one in the present northern Vietnam) shook the Chinese hold. This Han domination had disrupted local Bronze Age patterns, and there followed a blending of the Sinitic features with ongoing local patterns to form valley chiefdoms of a different sort, able to deal more

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<sup>1</sup> Yao (2016:ch 3-6).

<sup>2</sup> Henry Wright (personal communication, 11 November 2016).

effectively with outside powers. With this new form of local leadership, competition increased among the many *dong* communities. Operating within what Yao (2016:225) terms "a different juridical-political space" from either the Bronze Age or the Han imperial eras, these *yishuai* utilized both indigenous bronze drum traditions and Chinese elements (like seals) to establish their local authority, proving their ability to lead their *dong* as they engaged the outside world.<sup>1</sup>

The *Shui jing zhu* shows us the general Chinese ignorance of local politics in the Dong World from the dissolution of the Han empire during the second and third centuries CE through the sixth century, particularly of its western sector. Generally, *yishuai* (and in particular Cuan clans and their "Spirit Lords" [*guizhu*] in the eastern sector) thrived in the mountain valleys, especially after Zhuge Liang's third century campaign (225 CE) into the eastern sector from Sichuan. Yet tales within the *Shui jing zhu* reflected a deep respect of the Chinese for the indigenous powers of the Dong World, seen in the form of spirits and supernatural animals. Difficult to tame and bring under some sort of control, the many *dong* powers continued to thwart Chinese efforts to put them in their proper place. They threatened imperial expansion and sat across the overland trade routes.<sup>2</sup> We can see this in Churchman's studies (2011/2013; 2015; 2016) on the eastern edge of the Dong World.

Here, in the new situation of the *yishuai* (now *lishuai*), local chieftains in their *dong* valleys developed their new pattern of bronze drum leadership. This new form capitalized on their trade, on the resulting economic wealth, and on external contacts to enhance their local competitive edge against both other *dong* chiefdoms and the Chinese realms (Jin, Liu-Song, Liang, Qi, and Chen) attempting to control them. Focusing on their drums, the *lishuai* (locally called *dulao*),<sup>3</sup> "extremely powerful and heroic" (Churchman 2011/2013:76; 2015:63; 2016:68) in a contemporary Chinese description, increased their authority, organized their societies within their *dong* valleys, and

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<sup>1</sup> Yao (2016:ch 6-7).

<sup>2</sup> Taylor (1995:33-34, 45-46), Yao (2016:127-131), and Backus (1981:6-9).

<sup>3</sup> For a mention of *dulao* in later centuries, see Holm (2003:170).

led them against other *dong* as well as the encroaching Chinese forces. These centuries appear to have seen the formation of the ruling 'clans' (entourages) bearing Chinese surnames (Huang, Nong) around the chieftains (Holm 2003:167-68). At times, such action might involve the forces of numerous allied *dong*, on occasion perhaps those of a single *dong*. Chinese texts record numbers from a few soldiers to many thousands. Indeed, local Chinese officials began to take on *dong* characteristics as they worked to control their territories.<sup>1</sup>

With first the Sui,<sup>2</sup> then the Tang dynasties in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, Chinese imperial power began to press into the Dong World anew, particularly in the east. The Guangxi territory described by Churchman came to be strongly dominated by the new imperial administrative structure. This brought an end to the chiefdoms there and their bronze drum leadership. They were replaced by imperial symbols of authority and *jimi* 'halter and bridle' alliances with the Chinese.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, Sui and Tang forces were destabilizing the Cuan *dong* chiefdoms in the eastern sector, a bit to the west of the area Churchman has described. One Sui Dynasty expedition (597) penetrated the central Dong World, defeating over thirty *dong* chiefdoms. Disrupted by the Sui, the Cuan territories were then throttled by the Tang. Dealing first with the Cuan on the east, the Tang then pushed into the western sector, causing *jimi* alliances to form there. After a quiet period, the 640s and 650s saw the Tang push farther into the western sector in an effort to open the road to India for themselves. This led to local resistance and a major Tang response. Over seventy *dong* led by their Spirit Lords in the western sector submitted and allied with the Tang, including the Meng, a clan on the southwestern edge of the Chinese advance. In the process, the Cuan to the east had weakened and become targets of this rising power to the west, the Meng Clan of Nanzhao (see Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Churchman (2011/2013:71-78; 2015:60-68; 2016:ch 4), and Holm (2003:170).

<sup>2</sup> The Sui Dynasty lasted from 581 to 617.

<sup>3</sup> Churchman (2011/2013:79-82; 2015:68-74; 2016:ch 6).

<sup>4</sup> Backus (1981:9-22, 64-68).

The Tang disruption of the eastern and central sectors of the Dong World allowed *dong* clans farther to the south and west to benefit from the Chinese actions and the resulting local power vacuum. The Meng Clan of the Nanzhao 'Southern Realm of six (or eight) Lordships', farthest from the Tang incursion, took advantage of the situation. Utilizing their contacts with the Tang and their *dong* leadership, the Meng moved from chieftain ("Spirit Lord") to overlord ("Great Spirit Lord") during the following two and a half centuries. We see this in great detail in Fan Chuo's late ninth century *Man shu*. Having become an equal player with the Tang and the Tubo court of Tibet, Nanzhao strove to dominate the Dong World from its far southwestern locale, requiring Chinese attention as exemplified in the *Man shu*. From the mid-seventh century to the mid-eighth, this *dong* clan worked with the Tang against Tibet and other local threats and gradually came to control the adjacent five (or seven) other major *dong* in their vicinity before moving east against the weakened Cuan.

The second half of the eighth century, following the great An Lushan rebellion of the 750s against the Tang, saw Nanzhao join the Tubo to challenge the Tang hold within the Dong World, before rejoining the Tang in the 790s against the increasingly aggressive Tubo and broader Tibetan designs. Nanzhao power culminated through the ninth century as it drove the weakening Tang out of the Dong World. Masters of their mountain domain, the Nanzhao Great Spirit Lords connected with the Irrawaddy valley and ultimately India, gaining both wealth and Buddhism. Becoming maharajas (with the Indic *Abhiseka* [consecration] ceremony) and Vajrayanists with a flourishing local form (using both Sanskrit and Chinese writing), the Meng lords of Nanzhao ruled a major realm within the Dong World.<sup>1</sup> In the process, they undoubtedly spread such political authority and Avalokitesvara worship deeper into the Dong World and threatened lowland Southeast Asia in the process.

While we have not pieced together a complete picture of Buddhism's introduction into the Dong World, we have found

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<sup>1</sup> Fan Ch'o (1961 [860s]), Backus (1981:chs 3-6), Whitmore (2016), and Holm (2003:168).

distinguishing characteristics in the practices of Nanzhao and its successor, the Dali Kingdom. Henrik Sorensen (2011a; 2011b) observes that even though Mahayana Buddhist practices may have entered Yunnan by the late Han Dynasty (certainly into Nanzhao society by the seventh century) through Sichuan, and that Sinitic forms of Mahayana and Esoteric Buddhism (by the late ninth century) would take hold in both Nanzhao and Dali temple activity, "there are also many differences and anomalies special to the Buddhists of Dali." He concludes that "this indicates the existence of a flourishing local form of Esoteric Buddhism that was only partly under the influence of Chinese culture" (2011a:386). The reliance on spells, mantras, and talismans of all types and for many purposes is, in Sorensen's thinking, a distinguishing feature of Nanzhao and Dali Buddhism. The founding myth of the Nanzhao Kingdom is closely linked to the figure of the Bodhisattva Guanyin (Avalokitesvara), and Sorensen contends that this link extended into the Dali period.

Esoteric forms of veneration are widely depicted in Nanzhao cave art and in Zhang Shengwen's pictorial 1173-1176 "Long Scroll." Could this esoteric veneration of Avalokitesvara be a feature of Dong World Buddhism, or is the worship of this well-known figure too widespread to be considered a distinguishing characteristic? This point requires further exploration. The Bai people's burial practices of the Dali period incorporated Esoteric Buddhist features not widely practiced in China at this time, including the placement of funerary urns in small schist coffins, inscribed with Sanskrit *bija* mantras and containing the deceased individual's personal effects.<sup>1</sup> Chinese style funerary practices did not enter this region until after the era of Mongol conquest, which fits well with our periodization for the beginning of widespread political and cultural realignment.

Within the first decade of the tenth century, both the Tang and Nanzhao regimes collapsed and disappeared. We hear no more of the Meng Clan. In 937, the Dali realm, led by the Duan Clan, former

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<sup>1</sup> Kao (2013:58-59) notes Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) cults in caves in modern Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, perhaps a continuation of Nanzhao-Dali practices.

bodyguards of the Meng, arose, based in that western plain. Twenty-three years later, the Song Dynasty unified China. Yet neither of these two new realms was as aggressive as their predecessors had been. For three centuries, until the Mongol invasions, they tended to co-exist and leave one another alone. It was predominantly the Song need for horses that required any contact, especially for the Southern Song from the 1120s on. The *dong* communities continued their local rivalries, with many bound to the new ruling Duan Clan, despite the latter's reduced and cautious stance.

Strongly Buddhist now, the Duan moved in 971 to extend their local power by joining clans of thirty-seven *dong* chiefdoms in the eastern sector together in a broad alliance (as recorded in a local stone inscription). In this way, the Duan kept the Dong World generally stable and the way east open for the horse trade. Later Vietnamese sources recorded Dali in the late eleventh century as the home of a man with magical powers.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, in the mid-eleventh century, Nùng in the mountains north of Đại Việt, led by Nong Zhigao/Nùng Trí Cao, established their own autonomous Tai realm among the valleys in the eastern Dong World.<sup>2</sup>

For the two Guangxi officials of the 1170s, Fan Chengda and Zhou Qufei, Dali was a distant, little-known place. It was "extensive and its population numerous, and its weapons and arms extensive" (Fan Chengda 2010 [1070s]:225), perhaps reviving a memory of Nanzhao. They knew of the horse trade into their territory, but generally focused on their immediate surroundings on the eastern edge of the Dong World. In their territory, filled with *dong* communities and the clans that ran them (Nong, Huang, et al.), the Chinese favored *jimi* 'alliances' with certain clans of the local chieftains who garnered titles and material benefits therefrom.

The chieftains in general directed the affairs, especially economic, of their *dong* and negotiated with the Chinese as they continued to compete with their fellow *dong* chieftains in neighboring

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<sup>1</sup> Fan Chengda (2010 [1170s]:ch 13), Backus (1981:159-164), Anderson (2015:106-110), Sorensen (2014a; 2014b), and Whitmore (2011:107).

<sup>2</sup> Anderson (2007) and Holm (2003:168-169).

valleys (as well as within their own clans) for influence and manpower. Local feuds and conflicts among clans abounded. Much conniving took place, as chieftains sought to involve the Chinese in their own schemes against rivals. Backed by well-armed, tough local warriors, now with footwear and crossbows, these chieftains proved to be formidable local powers. Thus, into the thirteenth century, the Dong World retained its autonomy and activities (though not as active as in the Nanzhao era) and even on its eastern fringes remained pursuant of its own interests while being engaged with the Chinese imperial structure.<sup>1</sup>

The political impact of the Dong World on surrounding regions was significant, particularly to the south. At the peak of its power during the ninth century, Nanzhao campaigns might have pushed down into and strongly affected communities in the valleys of the Irrawaddy (830s) and the Red (Hồng) (860s) rivers, as well as attacking north into Sichuan (820s, 870s). Well-remembered in later centuries by the Burmans and the Vietnamese, these highland campaigns caused major disruptions among Pyu and other peoples of the Irrawaddy hills and plain, and the Vietnamese and Tai peoples in the hills and plain of the Red (Hồng) River.<sup>2</sup> Such activities helped open the way from the Dong World into the lowland plains of mainland Southeast Asia. Tai peoples, disrupted first by Nanzhao actions, then in the eleventh century by Nong Zhigao/Nùng Trí Cao's Tai realm and its defeat in the Dong World space between Chinese and Vietnamese domains, were willing and able to gain mutual advantage with neighbors and outsiders, and the chiefdoms practiced the art of this negotiation amid good or ill balances of power. In the last century BCE, the major Han presence had had a strong impact on the scattered *dong* communities, some greater, some lesser, especially on the east, but it did not last. Thereafter, into the seventh century CE, *dong* chieftains, now more experienced with external forces, developed their own strengths. Power in the Dong World had peaked with the Nanzhao realm of the Meng during the ninth century and had subsided to a stable level under the Duan Clan of Dali.

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<sup>1</sup> Fan Ch'o (1961 [860s]:72-74, 149-171, 223-229).

<sup>2</sup> Fan Ch'o (1961 [860s]:ch 10) and Whitmore (2000; 2016).



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STATES

The major break in the balance of the Dong World came in the second half of the thirteenth century when the Mongol empire crashed into its midst as they sought to outflank and defeat the Southern Song regime. Straight through its mountainous terrain (and out the other side), a deeper penetration than any earlier strike, the Mongols captured Dali, ending Duan dominance, and, following Nanzhao, plunged down the Great Descent (Marco Polo's phrase) into the Irrawaddy and Red (Hồng) River valleys.<sup>1</sup> In effect, the Yuan and succeeding Ming regimes split the Dong World in half, between the northern territory more or less controlled from their capital (becoming southwest China) and the southern territories (now northern Southeast Asia) eventually brought within the jurisdictions of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. As the early modern states developed, they increasingly engaged the *dong* regions.

Throughout these mountains, the many *dong* communities in the highland valleys struggled to maintain their autonomy and freedom of action. Whereas in earlier centuries, those *dong* in contact with Chinese administration had allied themselves in *jimi* 'halter and bridle' relations, now contacts with external forces, especially Chinese, became more direct and controlling. Still the Chinese regimes were in no position (and generally had little inclination) to apply their standard bureaucratic procedures to the *dong* they could reach. The result was indirect rule, for the Chinese via the *tusi*, native officials appointed by the emperor (often in fact merely confirming a local chieftain). A step up from the prior *jimi* relationship, it still allowed a significant amount of autonomy on the local scene and indeed helped consolidate the *tusi*'s local authority and control as he was now backed by the threat of imperial power. Over the centuries, as external powers north and south pushed to expand and define their jurisdictions, more and more of the *dong* chieftains came to have roles related to the lowland royal courts, whether in China, Myanmar, Thailand, or

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson (2015) and Sun (2015:193-231).

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Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

The *tusi* system developed within the Dong World over the next half millennium, through the Yuan and Ming dynasties into the Qing (thirteenth to eighteenth centuries). The system grew slowly as the *dong* chieftains and the northern administrative regimes adjusted to each other. When the Mongols came crashing through the Dong World in the last half of the thirteenth century, the Tantric Duan lords of Dali and the many *dong* chieftains in the mountain valleys had to adapt quickly to new circumstances and relationships. Being either in a large valley or on a major route, they were exposed to the direct force of Mongol power. Rejecting negotiations in the 1250s, the Duan eventually capitulated after coming under attack on three sides from Mongol as well as allied local forces. Becoming themselves part of and serving the Mongol machine, the Duan aided its further advances through the Dong World against Pagan (Myanmar) and Thăng Long (Đại Việt) in the southern lowlands. Overall, many *dong* chieftains in the Mongols' path chose either resistance and punishment (or flight deeper into the mountains) or alliance with the victors. Some not in the Duan power structure thereby took that opportunity to strengthen their own local positions.<sup>2</sup>

These latter *dong* chieftains became *tusi* in the Mongol commandery system under the auspices of newly-appointed Central Asian Muslim lords in what was now officially called Yunnan. The latter, Semuren 'non-Mongols' gathered during the great Mongol Eurasian conquests, stood between the new Yuan court of China<sup>3</sup> in Beijing and these allied *dong* chieftains. Introducing the Sinitic system (schools, markets, etc.) into Yunnan's administrative centers, these Muslim lords set up the *tusi* positions to incorporate their new local allies into the imperial administration. These chieftains received titles and material benefits as they were expected to serve Yuan demands by

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson and Whitmore (2015:21-30). Faure (2013a:1-2) also recognizes the development of *tusi* indirect rule, followed by the *gaitu guiliu* effort at direct rule.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson (2015:115-120), Herman (2007:48), and Sorensen (2014a:380-381).

<sup>3</sup> The Yuan Dynasty lasted from 1279 to 1367.

maintaining local order. Now part of the great Mongol order and its Chinese branch, yet generally left to their own devices locally for about a hundred years as *tusi*, the chieftains strengthened their immediate hold on power, cutting down on inter- and intra-valley rivalries. Their positions were hereditary and backed by the state power of the twelve provincial military garrisons. While *dong* resistance to this state power continued to exist deeper in the mountains and farther south, Yuan administration gradually extended more deeply into the Dong World and encompassed more *dong* communities within the imperial structure. Yet, as late as the 1320s, *dong* chieftains were telling Mongol officials to stay out of local rivalries and leave the locals alone – their affairs were of no concern to the Yuan (apparently with success).<sup>1</sup>

Deeper in the mountains beyond the Mongol reach and farther south stretching into the lowlands of Southeast Asia, the Yuan sought not *tusi* but *xuanweisi* 'pacification commissioners'. These were local chieftains and lords who would serve Mongol interests as guardians of the imperial flanks. They were not *guo* 'countries', but jurisdictions semi-attached to Beijing. The zone of such polities extended across the southern portion of the Dong World, that is, the northern Southeast Asian mainland, from Đại Việt in the Red River delta to Pagan on the Irrawaddy plain, and would eventually mark off 'Southeast Asia' from 'China.' We can see these relationships among four major *dong* lords (*chao*), Sipsongpanna on the north, Lan Sang to the east, Lanna on the south, and Keng Tung to the west: Lue, Lao, Yuan, and Shan peoples, respectively. They interacted among themselves and with the lowland powers around them, becoming *xuanweisi* 'pacification officers' for the Chinese, while dealing with Ava, Ayudhya, and other lowland Southeast Asian powers.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, the Mongol movement through the Dong World had been a great shock to the polities on its southern side. As Sun Laichen (2015:195) points out, Mongol envoys setting terms on the local regimes were seen locally as "harsh, tough, haughty, and rude." At a

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<sup>1</sup> Brose (2015:135-145, 149, 151-152), Sun (2015:201-203), and Wade (2015:80).

<sup>2</sup> Hsieh (1995:303-309).

time (thirteenth-fourteenth centuries) when there were shifting power balances across mainland Southeast Asia,<sup>1</sup> the Mongol shattering of the Dong World for the first time opened its southern sector to direct pressure from the Chinese empire. Nevertheless, the Mongol ability to control this far southern region was limited, and the *dong* lords realized that distance and terrain were on their side. For example, the Yuan Dynasty warning to an alliance of Sipsongpanna and Lanna not to attack neighboring *dong* got nowhere as the two realms' aggressive moves continued. Pushing southwest into the Irrawaddy plain, on the other hand, the Mongols had success. Yet, while Pagan now took part in the Yuan imperial system, the Mongols did not attain direct control over this court. It was simply too far.<sup>2</sup>

When the Ming Dynasty defeated and replaced the Yuan over the second half of the fourteenth century, Yunnan and the northern Dong World served as the last close refuge of the Mongols. As the Ming took control of this territory during the 1380s (including the still-extant Buddhist Duan Clan), in effect they shifted this portion of the Dong World out of the great Mongol empire and for the first time into that of China. While continuing to utilize hereditary families of Muslim descent (Mu and Ma) to handle this frontier territory, the Ming bureaucratic system penetrated Yunnan (along with Han population) more deeply than had the Yuan regime and tied the northern Dong World more tightly to the Chinese state. Military garrisons sat at important points on the trans-regional routes. In the process, *dong* chieftains who accepted the Ming regime became *tusi* once more, but now, in Brose's description (2015:147), "within a three-tiered pacification bureau ... staffed by native chieftains with Chinese clerical offices and overseen by the provincial Regional Military Affairs office." Drawn more deeply into the Ming state, the *dong* chieftains serving as *tusi* gained Beijing's confirmation of their local leadership, recognized by hereditary succession, titles, seals, official tallies, and imperial gifts.

Divided into civil and military status, the former tended to be closer to Ming administrative centers and the latter deeper in the

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<sup>1</sup> Lieberman (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Sun (2015:195, 202-206) and Hsieh (1995:309-310).

mountains. The civil *tusi* offices were staffed by a mixture of indigenous and Han personnel who followed more standard government procedure; the military *tusi* were mainly indigenous and less tied to such procedures. Where the former supplied records and resources, human and material, from their localities, the latter provided troops and information. The Ming expected the two types to keep proper order in their domains and to guard against both nearby resistance and distant threats and to supply native troops when required. In David Holm's words (2003:171), speaking of the Zhuang, "[They] were ferocious fighters and had an unparalleled knowledge of a complex terrain with subtropical jungle, jagged karst peaks, and underground watercourses." They were protecting not territory per se, but resources and the routes and passes through the Dong World. Performing to Ming expectations, the *dong* chieftains serving as *tusi* had great autonomy. Protected from both internal and external threats, these chieftains became fairly immune to *dong* social requirements.<sup>1</sup>

Through the first half of Ming rule, the royal court in Nanjing then Beijing, held the belief of *tianxia* 'all under Heaven' as one, under the Sinitic emperor. This included the *tusi*, as the Chinese felt the relationship between them to be close and only required exposure to the proper (Confucian) teaching. Unified in the human realm, the Ming court felt that *dong* communities along with *guo* 'realms' even farther south were not separate from themselves but linked all in one family. In the late fifteenth century, the Ming were bringing sons of *dong* chieftains into schools for proper education.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, from the mid-fifteenth through the sixteenth centuries, *dong* rulers began to shift their connections from the locality (as with the old Dali lords) to the Ming state. In one instance, a *tusi* clan utilized the Chinese literati pattern of compiling local gazetteers to ensure that their status and stance would continue.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson and Whitmore (2015:22-26) summarizes studies of the *tusi*, including those by Took (2005), Herman (2007), Holm (2003:170, 217), and Yang (1997:280-295; 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Anderson and Whitmore (2015:43, 45), Whitmore (2015:148-150), and Wade (2015:83).

<sup>3</sup> Lian (2013:86-110) and Dennis (2015).

Yet, by this time, this Chinese attitude had begun to shift as a mood of separation and cultural distance was setting in. Why? The Dong World had demonstrated its intransigence and desire for its own autonomy. Four *dong* on the Sino-Vietnamese border had opted out of the Ming state and into that of Đại Việt. Huge battles had taken place for sixty years ending in the 1440s on the southwest frontier against Luchuan/Mongmao, the last successful effort by Tai (Shan) *dong* lords to establish a realm in the northern sector of the Dong World, while to the east there were Yao wars.<sup>1</sup> The resulting sense of separation took the form of Chinese literati like Qiu Jun and Wang Yangming expressing distaste for engaging with these peoples and the need to keep one's defense up against them. One result was the construction of walls and gates to maintain just such a separation, internal as well as external.<sup>2</sup> The *tusi* and other *dong* chieftains continued to pursue their own interests, not the state's.

These *tusi*, and scattered, non-affiliated *dong* chieftains, inhabited the larger northern portion of the Dong World cut out first by the Mongols, then incorporated by the Ming (eventually to be southwestern China). Farther south lay the band of *xuanweisi* 'Pacification Commissions', ten of which extended all the way into the Southeast Asian lowlands, in less direct contact with the Ming imperial court, but which Beijing hoped to influence in some fashion. Such *dong* chieftains and local lords (primarily Tai who adopted the title *xuanweisi* [Tai, *saenwifu*] for their own purposes) in places like Sipsongpanna, Lanna, and Mongmao interacted with and played off the Ming efforts in their direction. But lowland forces now came not only from the north. State power was developing simultaneously in the plains of mainland Southeast Asia, Đại Việt in the Red River delta, Ayudhya in the Chao Phraya, and Toungoo in the Irrawaddy.<sup>3</sup> Each of these three states was expanding its power into its northern highlands and contesting Ming dominance among the *xuanweisi*. In the fifteenth

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<sup>1</sup> Baldanza (2015), Wade (2015:81-83), Faure (2007:93-98), Wang (1997:60-61), and Yang (1997:276, 279, 285-287).

<sup>2</sup> Anderson and Whitmore (2015:29).

<sup>3</sup> Lieberman (2003).

century, Đại Việt first drove the Ming out of the Red River delta after their two-decade occupation, getting the above-mentioned four *dong* to join it. In the late 1470s and early 1480s, Lê Thánh-tông and the Vietnamese drove across the *xuanweisi* zone as far as the Irrawaddy. In the sixteenth century, Toungoo under Bayinnaung pushed out of the Irrawaddy plain east across this zone, into Lanna and the Lao territories. Eventually, Thai power would move north out of the Chao Phraya as well. All the way into the mid-nineteenth century, both northern and southern states would contest this southern portion of the Dong World.<sup>1</sup>

With this contestation, and as the Ming tended to back off from the challenges and dangers of the Dong World as a whole, this territory grew more unstable and open to numerous activities, anarchic if you will, at a time of climatic and ecological change that led to cooler, drier weather.<sup>2</sup> *Tusi* seem to have become more locally powerful, supported but not interfered with by Ming officials. This possibly led to local corruption and oppression by *tusi* clans. Lying beyond tight official control, *dong* communities also became rife with heterodox thought and beliefs, refuges for those pursuing dreams and ideologies of their own making. Among these dreams were those held by deposed monarchs and their descendants, pretenders all. First there were the Mạc, former rulers of Đại Việt (1528-1592), surviving in the mountain valleys on both sides of the Sino-Vietnamese border through the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth. Then there came the remnants of the Southern Ming imperial court chased by the victorious Manchu conquerors across the Dong World east to west and into Ava territory on the Irrawaddy plain where they were captured and returned.<sup>3</sup>

The Manchu conquest of the Ming in the north opened the Dong World for both *dong* and southern external activities to thrive within the mountain valleys through the second half of the seventeenth century. First, it took years for the new Qing regime to gain control

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<sup>1</sup> Sun (2000) and Hsieh (1995:313-315).

<sup>2</sup> Marks (1998:46-52).

<sup>3</sup> Ong (2015) and Baldanza (2015:184-188; 2016:204-20).

over the *tusi* regimes, relying on former Ming generals, including Wu Sangui. Then in the 1670s, the latter resisted Manchu control in their Revolt of the Three Feudatories. When the Qing did control a *dong* community, they tended to continue the *tusi* clan autonomy, with only minor efforts at managing succession within them. In the meantime, the Qing were increasing the extraction of metals from the mountains, an activity begun by the Mongols and continued by the Ming. In the 1720s, with a strong rise in this extraction and the new Yongzheng emperor's (r. 1723-1735) stress on bureaucratic control, there occurred a major change in policy towards the *dong* communities and their *tusi* clans. This was *gaitu guiliu*, which replaced the *tusi* with regular bureaucratic officials.<sup>1</sup> In the strong belief that *tusi* clans were local tyrants harmful to the people, selling their land, and oppressing their *dong* communities, Yongzheng acted to end indigenous rule across the Dong World. In its place would be direct state jurisdiction and a sharper sense of what was considered Qing territory and where the frontier lay.

Such displacement of the *tusi* with Chinese officials had been occurring episodically for centuries on a minor basis. As the Ming backed away from the Dong World over the second half of their dynasty, this effort had slowed even more. Yongzheng turned this around in a systematic fashion. Now, and in the following centuries, the Chinese and the mainland Southeast Asian states all worked to gain such direct control, removing local *dong* autonomy in the process. Beginning from the mid-1720s for a decade, this Chinese emperor and his chief lieutenant in the Dong World, E'ertai (1680-1745), with the barbarian image firmly in their minds, strongly reduced the number of *tusi* across the region. Removed from government office, these *dong* chieftains melted back into the social fabric of their communities under the thumb of the local state bureaucrat.

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson and Whitmore (2015:31-32) summarizes studies on *gaitu guiliu*, including those by Giersch (2006), Took (2005:226-257), Herman (2007:168-169), Holm (2003:170, 217), and Yang (1997:279-280, 296-298, 303-304). Puer tea also came out of the mountains around Sipsongpanna (Yu 2016:95, 98-99).



This direct control now reached as far south as Sipsongpanna, much deeper into the Dong World than before, as gazetteers and maps recorded by the Qing made the territory more legible. *Tusi* still remained (and would do so until the mid-twentieth century), generally on the far fringes of the empire or deep in the mountain recesses. In the court's eyes, they served as warning fences against external provocations. While the *gaitu guiliu* effort slackened with local resistance under Yongzheng's son, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-96), through the rest of the eighteenth century and continued raggedly during the upheavals of the nineteenth, it set the pattern for states north and south as internationalization and greater mapping took place. State competition required better demarcation and jurisdictional control. The *dong* communities would increasingly become caught within this competition. On the one hand, they could play different states off against each other for their own benefit; on the other, they could suffer and be overrun by more powerful external forces.<sup>1</sup>

Competition in this conflict zone began in earnest over the second half of the eighteenth century. The centuries before this had seen states strengthen in mainland Southeast Asia. As noted, Đại Việt played a vigorous role in the southern Dong World during the fifteenth century. In Ava on the Irrawaddy plain, Toungoo power had pushed into the Shan *dong* as well as across Lanna into Lao territories. This Burmese dominance lasted among the Shan and in Lanna through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. Burmese and Chinese state authority met and mixed in places like Kengtung and Sipsongpanna. The collision came when Qianlong of the Qing pushed his troops southwest into this zone during the 1760s and was badly beaten. In the 1780s, his troops moved out of the Dong World into Đại Việt and again lost catastrophically. In the nineteenth century, as the Qing weakened and were hammered by the British along the coast, their grip on the Dong World loosened.

A new player in these mountains was now the Thai Chakri monarchy in their new capital of Bangkok. This aggressive realm took

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson and Whitmore (2015:32-34) and Faure (2013b).

Lanna out of Ava's claim, eventually absorbing it in the 1870s, and fought for dominance in Kengtung and Sipsongpanna within the northern sector of the Dong World. The middle of the nineteenth century saw anti-Qing revolts across the northern Dong World, the Christian Taiping (1850-1864) in the east, the Miao (1854-1873) in the center, and the Muslim Panthay/Du Wenxiu Rebellion (1856-1873) on the west. Then the century's second half had the British out of the Irrawaddy plain and the French from the Red River delta, cutting their way into the southwest and southeast flanks of the Dong World, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout this century and a half, from the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth,<sup>2</sup> the *dong* communities in their mountain valleys, near and far, individually adjusted to the forces, social, economic, cultural, religious, and political, constantly intruding into their territories. *Dong* chieftains, *tusi* lords, and those in the uplands amidst the growing chaos resisted or took advantage of these forces and continued to maintain their autonomy and agency as best they could.<sup>3</sup> Upland peoples like the Khmu and the Hmong dealt with Tai chieftains in the *dong* valleys, owing them payments and labor.<sup>4</sup> With international borders imposed on them (in somewhat confusing ways; MacLean 2015:383) during these years and theoretically/actually configuring their lives in ways often out of their control, there came the formation of borderworlds (in Mandy Sadan's phrase 2013:45, 156-167). The *dong* inhabitants thus lost much of the agency and autonomy they had previously obtained. Having gone from the general period of alliance up into the thirteenth century, through the

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<sup>1</sup> Lieberman (1984:130-137) and Smith (2013).

<sup>2</sup> For the southeast Dong World, see Lee (2015:70-78).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Davis (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Lee (2015:79-80). Evrard (2007), Bouté (2007), and Sprenger (2007) discuss the social and cultural impact (including titles, etc.) of the Tai in their *dong* on upland peoples, the Khmu, the Phunoy, and the Lamet. In inter-*dong* conflicts, these uplanders served as outer guardians of the valleys (Evrard 2007:133, Bouté 2007:188). In effect, the *dong* peoples in their relations with upland communities were replicating Chinese society's relationships with themselves.

half millennium of indirect rule of the *tusi* age (thirteenth to eighteenth centuries) into the increasingly-direct control of the *gaitu guiliu* era, the scattered *dong* communities in their mountain valleys have had to adapt to greater state control amid increasing external competition over the Dong World. The economic, political, and cultural forces from different directions have led to a *mélange* of local variations there. The increasing importance of imposed borders, though greatly porous, still tended to reduce and restrict cross-border interactions, sharpening the differences between the two sides.

The political turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century both loosened external control (in chaotic times) and tightened it (as the lowland states asserted themselves). The Chinese Nationalist and Communist regimes, though taking different approaches, both sought to assimilate the northern *dong* communities into the Chinese nation and play positive roles in the formation of their own modern nation-states.<sup>1</sup> Likewise in mainland Southeast Asia, forces working for independent and autonomous states saw their segments of the Dong World (as carved out by the colonial powers) forming part of the newly-recognized geo-body of their nations. Still the Dong World continued to allow for anti-state political and religious activities, as in prior centuries. The *dong* communities recognized by the British (Shan, Kachin, Lahu, Wa, et al.) on the southwest of the Dong World utilized this connection to maintain their authority in their own valleys, as the Communist Party of Burma also operated there (Smith 1991, especially ch 16).

To the east in the mountains of the Việt Bắc (the northern mountains of northern Vietnam), the Dong World provided room for anti-colonial forces to operate and to join with local Tai *dong* communities (especially Hồ Chí Minh and the base for his Việt Minh operations that culminated in the great battle of Điện Biên Phủ, a major *dong* valley). Upland Hmong clans also became heavily involved in these struggles (Lee 2015). To the north, through the northern portion of the northern Dong World, Mao Zedong led the Long March

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<sup>1</sup> Hsieh (1995:324-25, 327), Mullaney (2011), Yang (1997:280, 285, 298-303), Anderson and Whitmore (2015:40-42), and Winichakul (1994).

of his Communist Party across Guizhou to establish their base in Yan'an. In this way, *dong* communities participated in significant political activities that set the future of every one of the soon-to-be national regimes of the region.

#### TODAY'S DONG WORLD

Since 1950, independent regimes have risen all around the Dong World and have sought to consolidate their portions of this world, as defined by the modern international borders. The peoples of the *dong* communities have had little to say in all these major events, however much they participated in them. Only in Burma/Myanmar have such *dong* communities continued to play a significant role in state developments. Many Hmong (Miao-Yao) joined US forces to oppose the lowland Vietnamese intrusions into their territory in Laos and lost in 1975. The Democratic/Socialist Republic of Vietnam (DRV/SRV) has worked to integrate the *dong* territories in its northern and northwestern mountains, while still battling the Chinese there in 1979. The Vietnamese joined with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in following the Stalinist nationalities model to define the ethnic minorities, both upland and *dong* peoples, and to set up autonomous regions for them. Overall, across both the northern and southern sectors of the Dong World, state efforts to displace local rule by *dong* chieftains and to apply direct control has continued through the second half of the twentieth century into the twenty-first (see Fig. 3).

What was the nature of the *dong* communities and chiefdoms in the modern age? The French anthropologist Georges Condominas (1980) has given us a mid-twentieth century analysis of Tai *muang* (*dong*) across the Dong World.<sup>1</sup> Based on *muang* of the highland valleys, Tai communities centered themselves on the local spirit hierarchy, focused on the *phi* 'spirit' of the *muang*, with larger *muang* encompassing smaller ones in the political-religious hierarchy formed of shifting *dong* chiefdoms (*chao*). Expanding power (as O'Connor

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<sup>1</sup> See Tannenbaum (1995) for a description of Shan communities.

indicated above) meant moving into other *dong* valleys and developing their wet rice agriculture and its related customs, while maintaining relations among the many *dong*, whether ally or rival (or both).

The scheme was to create a network of *muang (dong)* lords and thus to dominate a territory and its routes (as in Sipsongpanna), while also integrating with local upland non-*dong* peoples. Out of such networks had emerged the *muang* overlords of Lanna, Lan Sang, and the Shan *sawbwa (chaofa)*. Another report (Ma 2014:43-44, 47-48) has spoken of Dai chiefdoms in Yunnan having applied different types of "taxes" on the upland peoples as opposed to the valley (*dong*) communities. The impacts of the encroaching states have disrupted such relationships, first with the imposed borders, then with lowland-derived regulations ("civilization"), resettlement, and re-organization. Such actions have greatly affected the *dong* social structure of the elite (mainly of the dominant clan), religious and political leaders in agriculture and war; the people of the rice paddies and soldiers; those in bondage; and the upland non-*dong* peoples from the mountain slopes under *dong* domination and being absorbed into *dong* society.

The 1950s and 1960s saw much turbulence, especially in the southern Dong World as the politics of the newly-established nations worked themselves out. The PRC and the DRV moved strongly into their claimed segments of the Dong World, the PRC throughout the northern sector, and the DRV in the Việt Minh base at the eastern end of the southern sector. Elsewhere, the central and western territories of the southern sector, mainly across northern Thailand and Myanmar, became a refuge and open area for migrants from the PRC (from both upland and *dong* communities, but mainly defeated Kuomintang/Guomindang [KMT/GMD] troops) and for opium cultivation and movement (the Golden Triangle). Until they were all pulled out of these mountain valleys and relocated to Taiwan by 1961, the remaining Nationalist forces attempted attacks from the southern sector into the northern, often with the support of non-Communist lowland governments and the US.

Even with the move to Taiwan to rejoin the Nationalist regime there, KMT/GMD villages have remained in this southern sector, in

northeast Myanmar (especially Kokang, Shan State) and just across the border in far northern Thailand. There they (as well as the Communist Party of Burma) have often taken part in opium production and trafficking, providing protection for caravans throughout the Dong World, including within China. Some *dong* chieftains of varied ethnic groups, Tai, Kachin, Wa, and others, have joined them in these endeavors.<sup>1</sup>

These ethnic groups represent the movement of peoples, upland as well as *dong*, through the Dong World over the centuries. Tibeto-Burmans like the Kachin and Lahu, have traveled south into the southern sector and Tai like the Shan and Lue have moved west across this sector, while Mon-Khmer like the Wa have maintained their positions within this territory. This is particularly interesting for the previously-headhunting Wa who are apparently indigenous survivors in the midst of the Tibeto-Burman, Tai, and Miao-Yao migrations respectively out of the west, east, and north of the Dong World. The Wa to this day, have stood their ground across what has become the international PRC/Myanmar border. The Wa community and its orators have brought Tai (Shan) Buddhism into their political structure and to its lords. They have resisted other ethnic groups as well as British intrusions (in the 1930s), and over the past seven decades the surrounding states of the PRC and Myanmar, both politically and economically, licit and illicit in state terms. Though the *gaitu guiliu* has hampered the Wa in the northern sector, those across the border have staunchly resisted state intrusions.<sup>2</sup>

The *dong* chieftains and their communities in the southern sector have profited from the openness and its commercial possibilities in order to strengthen their local situations and to resist state advances from the lowlands into their mountain valleys. Violence, corruption, and clandestine trade have all played their roles in these

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<sup>1</sup> Chang (2014), Steinberg and Fan (2012:46-55, map 6), and Siriphon (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Ma (2013:23-27; 2014:44-48), Liu (2015:83-86), Eimer (2014:ch 19), Steinberg and Fan (2012:56, 252, 277-278, 316), Smith (1991:315-316), and Fiskesjo (2010).

efforts to establish their local power. In the northern sector, the PRC gained control over the major *dong* chiefdoms, particularly Dai Sipsongpanna and its *chao* 'lord', formerly a pacification officer, thus cutting them off from Lan Sang, Lanna, and Keng Tung (respectively now in Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar) to the south.<sup>1</sup> Existing in the Kachin and Shan States of Myanmar and Lanna, such modern *dong* chiefdoms have included Tibeto-Burman Kachin, Tai Shan, and Mon-Khmer Wa and to the east in Laos the ill-fated Miao-Yao Hmong. They all have utilized their continuing frontier existence to keep their local autonomy against the lowland states, by any means necessary, through resistance, accommodation, or isolation.

Pursuing their own interests in their highland valleys, well-armed from their trade and/or opium profits, these communities and their chieftains have stood fast against state demands as best they could. With fellows of their same ethnic groups in the borderworld split off by imposed international borders, these *dong* communities can influence events in both China and Southeast Asia, as well as India. In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of such upland and *dong* groups from Yunnan, with PRC encouragement and radio broadcasts in Shan and Kachin, supported their compatriots in Myanmar. The opium trade also had its impact in both countries. Thus, from the 1950s through the 1980s, it was mainly political matters, reinforced by local economies that fed turbulent developments across a great part of the southern Dong World.<sup>2</sup>

For the past thirty years and on into the future, it is the economic developments coming out of the PRC, led by Deng Xiaoping's new commercial policies, that have come to dominate the Dong World, north and south. The northern sector had seen, first, the PRC work to complete *gaitu guiliu* and to establish its cadre structure through the 1950s, effectively ending the "feudal" *tusi* system and setting up ethnic ("nationality" - the fifty-six *minzu*) autonomous

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<sup>1</sup> Hsieh (1995:314-319, 323-324).

<sup>2</sup> Steinberg and Fan (2012:61, 105, 138, 249, 269, 271-272, 314-316, 319, 326, 351), Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin (2012:237, 241, 246, 265-266), Eimer (2014:chs 15-20), and Sadan (2013:347-360).

regions in their stead, with Deng Xiaoping significantly involved in these actions. Second, in the 1960s and through the 1970s, the radical activities of the Cultural Revolution and its Red Guards and sent-down youth permeated the major mountain valleys. Meanwhile, roads and electricity had begun to appear throughout this territory.<sup>1</sup>

With Deng in power, commerce and economic development came to the fore, producing far-reaching implications for the Dong World. In the process, the PRC has demonstrated that it now wants peace and stability across the southern Dong World in order to gain economic access. Just as the Han and later dynasties had realized, the PRC too (and with it specifically Yunnan Province) see the Dong World as an overland path to the South Seas (Nanyang) and to India, not for the valuables of yesteryear, but for those of today, primarily energy sources. For the *dong* communities, this has again presented both opportunities and threats.

For the PRC, Yunnan and the Dong World at large have become not so much a barbarian "backwater" as a "bridgehead" reaching across the mountains through the *dong* communities to connect with economic forces on the far side. In this way, the decentralization of PRC's new socialist market economy has worked to open the commercial sector and thus the Dong World itself, both the Chinese northern and the Southeast Asian southern sectors. These past three decades have seen ever-increasing movement back and forth between the two.

This period has also seen cultural recognition as well as the international concept of "indigenous space" for the *dong* communities. Occurring simultaneously with the Chinese state's determination to push through the Dong World to utilize the resources lying therein and beyond, it has resulted in greater possibilities for local effort and demands (Oakes 2004:287). The desired extraction and tourism has required major infrastructure construction, which has proceeded actively through the mountains. For Yunnan, this has meant, in Tim

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<sup>1</sup> Hsieh (1995:326-327), Liu (2015:84-85), Sigley (2016a:172, 188-190, 195-198), Kaup (2000:chs 3-4), Mullaney (2011), Holm (2003:6-8), Yang (1997:285, 287, 300, 304), and Anderson and Whitmore (2016:43-45).



Summers's words (2016:144), "a sophisticated road network, ... growing aviation routes, communications infrastructure, and rail networks, and an increase in the number and capacity of border crossings." This includes highways to the ports of Bangkok and Haiphong (via Hanoi). Presently, the Chinese are also constructing a high-speed railway to Vientiane in Laos. The purpose here, in one observer's eyes (Strangio 2016:A8), is to make Boten in northern Laos "a transportation hub facilitating greater Chinese penetration ..." of the southern sector.<sup>1</sup>

Even more important for the PRC is access to the West, to India, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, via the Dong World, the Irrawaddy plain of Myanmar, and the Indian Ocean. This requires stability in both the northern and southern sectors of the Dong World, so gaining the trust and favor of the *dong* communities is essential, hence the necessity for ceasefires with the upland and *dong* (minority) groups in northern Myanmar. Besides the transport network, there is the energy sector. This involves not only China as a whole, but more specifically the needs of the Dong World itself. The Chinese nation's economy and sustainability depend on access to energy, especially gas and oil, west of the Strait of Melaka. Development of the Dong World also requires it. This has taken the PRC into Myanmar's coastal oil sector as well as a port for supplies from the Middle East, all involving pipelines and their pump stations through the Dong World, south and north.

Security for these pipelines requires peaceful relations on both sides of the border. Specifically, in the southern sector, this means ceasefires with *dong* chieftains of the ethnic minorities – Kachin, Shan, Wa, and even Han living there. In the northern sector, the provincial government of Yunnan has actively pursued these projects. Wealth and energy are spreading throughout the northern Dong World into Guizhou and Guangxi. In addition, there are hydropower projects in both sectors of the Dong World and the power lines for electricity distribution. Damming the many fast-flowing streams and rivers can

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<sup>1</sup> Summers (2013:ch 6), Hathaway (2010), Sigley (2016a:190-195), Strangio (2016:A4, 8), and Kaup (2000:chs 5-7).

be both beneficial and damaging to local and downstream *dong* communities, due to relocations and disruptions to water flow. How this affects the centuries-long irrigation pattern of the *dong* communities needs to be examined. Increasingly, over these three decades, Chinese, particularly Yunnanese, enterprises have pushed out of this northern sector into the southern.<sup>1</sup>

With infrastructure development and the consequent increase in cross-border trade and investment, has come a rapid rise in tourism and "lifestyle migration." Many Han and other travelers have been moving into the northern sector of the Dong World and going beyond into the southern sector, as the latter has itself gained from lowland and foreign visitors. Looking for the exotic among the "authentic" upland and *dong* communities and the natural wonders of this very different environment, Chinese visits have led to the (re)construction of the imagined ethnic world portrayed in the multi-*minzu* 'nationality' view of the PRC. Indeed, the very ruggedness of the Dong World has drawn Chinese and foreigners throughout the mountain territory in trekking and climbing expeditions. Many Chinese have also sought a more pleasant life there than their lowland existences allowed. In addition, crossing the border, especially on day-trips into Myanmar, allows for pleasures (such as casinos) not available in the PRC and frequently shut down by Beijing. More important are the business enterprises and their labor force (out of Yunnan specifically and the PRC more generally) moving ever more deeply into the southern sector, together with a PRC *renminbi* cash zone forming there. Many businessmen, particularly in the extractive industries, make deals with *dong* chieftains, notably in the Shan and Wa territories. The Chinese enclave of Kokang has gained much in these activities. This Chinese economic penetration now extends across the entirety of the southern sector.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steinberg and Fan (2012:chs 6-10), Nijhuis (2015), Oakes (2004), and Giry and Wai Moe (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Steinberg and Fan (2012:242-265), Sigley (2016a:177, 180, 183, 191, 195, 199, 203, n 38; 2016b), Hernandez and Innes (2016), Eimer (2014:ch 20), Strangio (2016), Montague (2016), Hsieh (1995:327), Liu (2015:85), Bartsch (2000), Swain (2011), and Turner et al. (2015:133-135, 161-163).

Moving north, another aspect of this thriving Dong World economic growth has been the narcotics trade. Based in the southern sector among upland and *dong* communities, this production and distribution has had a strong effect on the northern sector and on into China proper, where it has been seen, in the words of Steinberg and Fan (2012:269), "as an existential threat to the state." Opium production in the Dong World had developed strongly from the mid-nineteenth century, with large amounts of supplies moving by caravan and railroad in the 1920s and 1930s. Heroin, and recently methamphetamines, have been hugely profitable for some upland and *dong* chieftains and have helped them strengthen their situations against state actions. The PRC looks to block this flow first in the western portion of the Dong World (Yunnan), then in its eastern portion (Guizhou, Guangxi), and finally along its southeast coast and in other provinces bordering the mountains. These anti-drug efforts have also led to PRC penetration of the southern sector, as it deals with *dong* chieftains there and uses satellites and drones for observation. In this, Chinese authority and power have gradually extended into zones of the southern sector considered threatening and dangerous to the PRC and its population. Chinese programs to provide economic alternatives to the narcotics production and distribution mean their further intrusion through the southern sector. The Chinese have pressured *dong* chieftains in Myanmar and Laos to cease their production and have also sought to educate local Chinese communities in the mountain valleys properly. Thus, the ever-watchful eye of the PRC, as in past centuries, has continued to try and determine events throughout the Dong World and to influence/control them in some fashion.<sup>1</sup>

Also moving from the southern sector have been influences emanating from the lowlands of the Southeast Asian mainland, particularly the Thai. From the first half of the twentieth century, Bangkok, changing the national name from Siam to Thailand, has been asserting its role as natural leader of all Tai peoples. Once seeing

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<sup>1</sup> Steinberg and Fan (2012:269-280), Siriphon (2016:8-13), and Slack (2001:3-7, 13-16, 26-28).

Bangkok as a competitor with the highland *dong* lords, Tai in the northern sector of the Dong World now look to Bangkok and Thailand in general for an alternative view of the world. Though often resisted within the southern sector, the opening of the PRC border over the past four decades has allowed northern-sector Tai more exposure to Bangkok and its influences, seen in Shih-Chung Hsieh's (1995:328) words as "'a great and wealthy Buddhist country' ... a respectable and proud brother country ..." Theravada Buddhism is thus a major one of these southern influences, penetrating more deeply into the Dai world around Sipsongpanna. On the one hand, it reinforces the local tourist draw there; on the other, it might be seen as a separatist threat to the PRC *minzu* scheme. Buddhism, both Theravada and Mahayana, as well as Christianity, have also reached more deeply into upland communities like the Wa and the Lahu in response to modern intrusions.<sup>1</sup>

What has all this meant for the *dong* communities, north and south? For the states, as for Fan Chengda and Zhou Qufei eight centuries earlier, peoples of the *dong* communities have better contacts with the lowland powers and approach "civilization" in their highland valleys, unlike the peoples living up the mountainsides. This is especially the case with the Dai of Sipsongpanna who, according to Hathaway (following John McKinnon) (2013:61), "raised paddy rice, cultivated diversity-rich home gardens, grew their own fuel-wood in groves, and maintained 'sacred forests,'" and are thus more privileged than the highlands in the state's eyes. Yet many of the inhabitants of the northern sector of the Dong World, particularly those up the slopes, have seen major disruptions in their lives and their socio-economic relations. Various communities have been arbitrarily mashed together into single *minzu* and ranked against other such groups, another state aspect to be ignored or manipulated where possible.

Deprived of their guns and restricted in their hunting by PRC regulations, many of the mountain folk have become poachers and have seen an increasing lack of local autonomy under the eyes of direct

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<sup>1</sup> Hsieh (1995:302, 327-28), Eimer (2014:ch 10), Hathaway (2013:346), Ma (2013:ch 1), Sadan (2013:ch 8), and Lee (2015:69).

state cadre presence. In the process, socio-cultural patterns have fractured. For upland peoples like the Jinuo and the Lahu, severe dislocations have led to individual problems. Poverty has increased and alcoholism and suicides have appeared. Religious beliefs, especially Buddhism, have become a refuge, while some people have moved, seeking less accessible territory, even across the international border to join their ethnic fellows in the more open southern sector (northern Southeast Asia). Another aspect of this situation has been the shortage of marriageable Han women in the PRC at large. A result is the movement of females (Lahu, Kachin, and others), some out of the southern sector, by both legal and illegal means, into Chinese society. The narcotics situation has brought further difficulties among upland and *dong* communities.<sup>1</sup>

In the southern sector, from northern Vietnam to northern Myanmar, both upland and *dong* communities have had to deal with the national configurations of each of their states. Whether socialist or not, these states place their "hill tribes" into subordinate categories. The peoples themselves take stands of their own - resistant, mimetic, compliant, or not - as they face the lowlanders and their particular capital. Myanmar sees strongly defined insurgent groups in the militarized and resource-rich hills and valleys of their Dong World. For Thailand, these peoples, more ignored than not, have to get the attention of Bangkok. In Laos, the distance between these peoples and the capital is even greater, while the Vietnamese maintain a tighter control on the *dong* valleys and uplands they claim, similar to the Chinese.<sup>2</sup> Overall, in both the northern and the southern sectors, life has become increasingly problematic in many of its relations with the great lowland state intrusions.

Thus, the peoples of the Dong World, in both the valleys and the uplands, have come to engage the modern world. Whether Tibeto-Burman, Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien), Tai, or Mon-Khmer, regardless of

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<sup>1</sup> Hsieh (1995:319-328), Hathaway (2013), Ma (2013), and Eimer (2014:ch 20).

<sup>2</sup> Pederson (2008), Ferguson (2015), Jonsson (2010), Turner et al. (2015), MacLean (2007), and Sadan (2013:ch 7).

their ecological circumstances, they have had to deal with intrusive state actions, increased international involvement, and the great technological advances of the age. Yet, as the volumes by Michaud and his colleagues (2000, Michaud and Forsyth 2011, Turner et al. 2015) so well illustrate, many of these peoples have applied degrees of agency in their actions and adapted their livelihoods to their new circumstances. While upland peoples have become increasingly and more directly involved in these activities, the *dong* and their valley inhabitants remain in key positions to vigorously mediate between this mountainous terrain and the actions of the outside world, negotiating and, where possible, benefitting.<sup>1</sup>

For almost 3,000 years in the Dong World, it has not been a question of openness to the outside world, but of the degree of this openness. Certain communities have been in closer contact, others less so, and some very little. By the twenty-first century, a stronger economic integration of the entire mountain region has taken place. Despite the imposed artificial international borders, the extent of new roads and rails, together with electronic connections, has meant a closeness for these *dong* communities that did not exist in past centuries. The state systems have intruded strongly, though not completely, especially in the southern sector where *dong* lords of past centuries remain in modern memory.<sup>2</sup> Some *dong* chiefdoms have held onto their autonomy to a certain extent, while others have been overwhelmed and re-organized. Among the many highland valleys across this world of the *dong*, coming to grips with their internal organization in this changing environment and negotiating their stances within their particular states and towards neighboring states continues to demand constant awareness and flexibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Turner et al. (2015:136-140, 157-159) gives a good example of uplanders (Hmong) having to rely on *dong* inhabitants (Tây) and lowlanders (Vietnamese [Kinh] and Han) to market their increasingly desired products.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of such veneration, the cult of Nong Zhigao/Nùng Trí Cao, on both sides of the Sino-Vietnamese border, see Anderson (2007:ch 7) and Kao (2013).

Figure 1. Map of the Dong World (Anderson and Whitmore 2015:4).

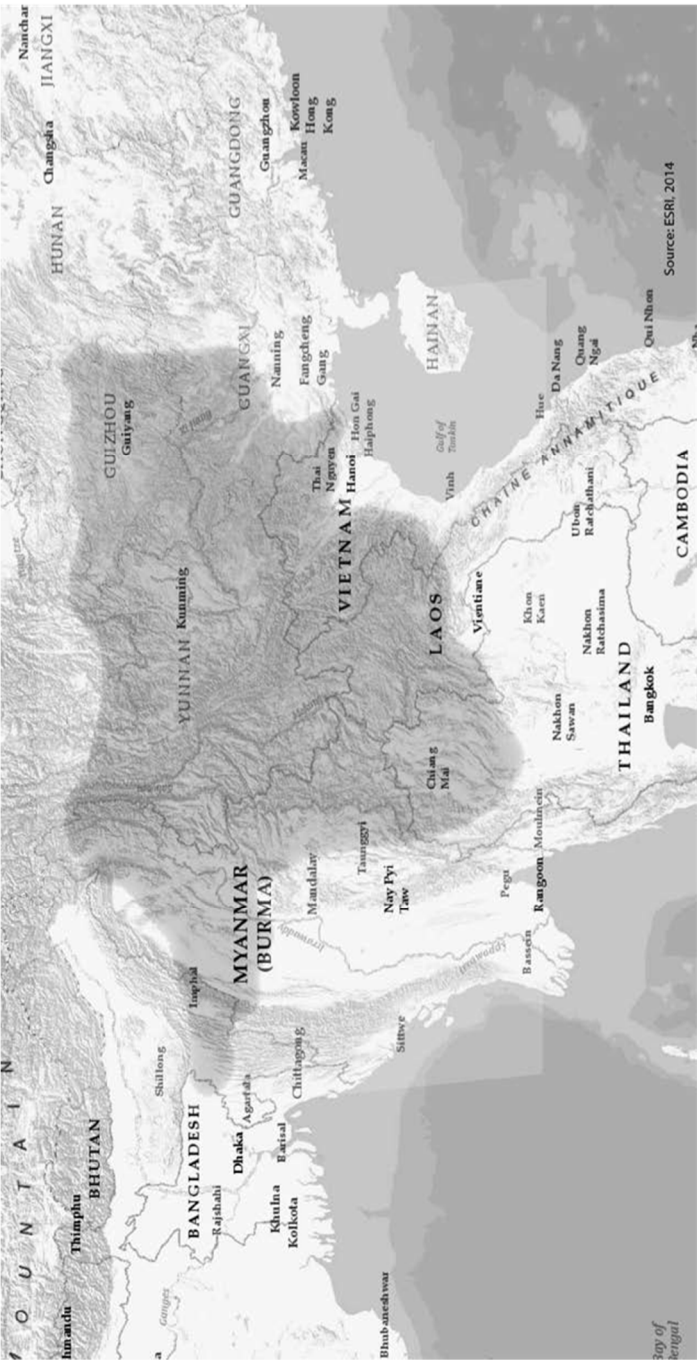


Figure 2. Map of the Nanzhao Kingdom (Anderson and Whitmore 2015:13).

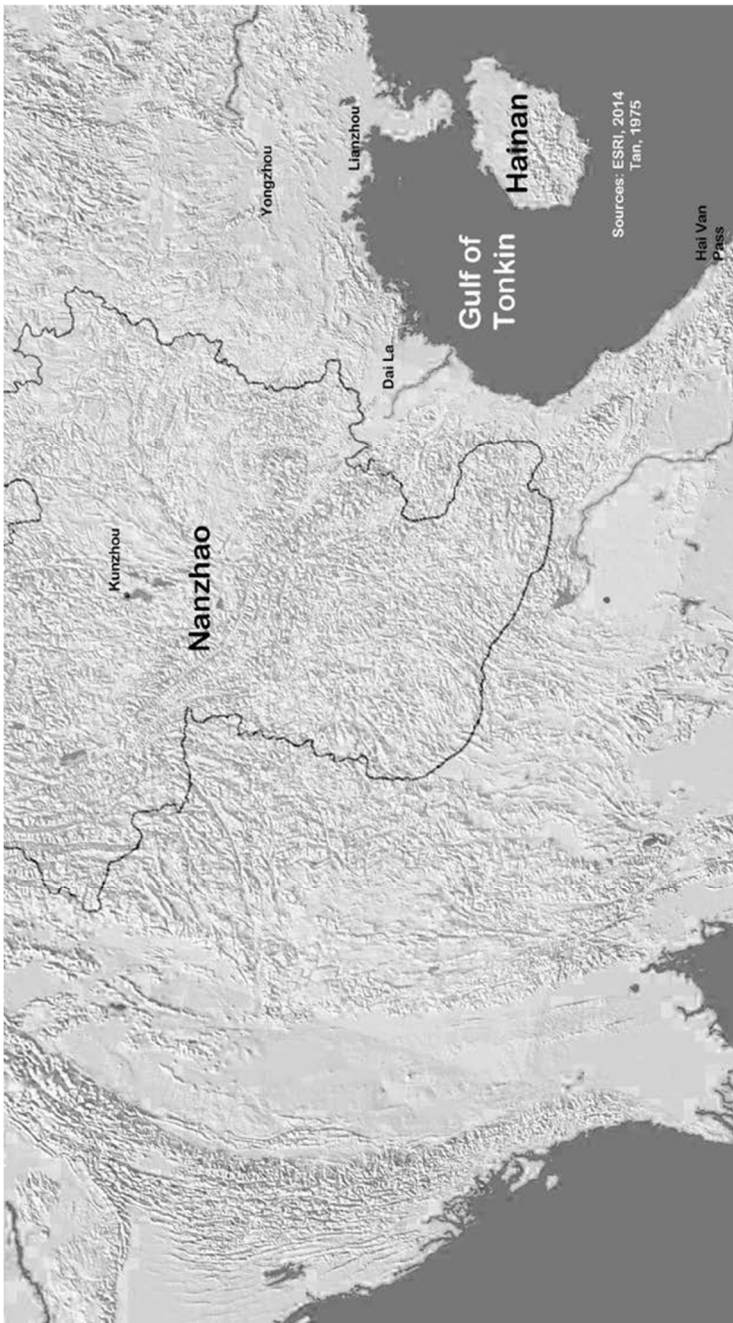




Figure 3: The Dong World landscape along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier (Xialei Township, southern Guangxi, James A Anderson).



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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

An Lushan 安祿山

Annan 安南

Ba 巴

Bai 白

bazi 坝子

Beijing 北京

Bija बीज

Chao 潮

Chen 陈

Chengdu 成都

chuan 川

chuan dong 川洞

Cuan 爨

Dai 傣

Dali 大理

Deng Xiaoping 邓小平

Dian 滇

dong 洞, 峒

Du Wenxiu 杜文秀

Dulao 都老

E'ertai 鄂尔泰

Fan Chengda 范成大

Fan Chuo 樊绰

gaitu guiliu 改土歸流

Guangxi 广西

gui zhu 鬼主

Guizhou 贵州

guo 国

Han 汉

Huang 黄

jimi 羁縻

Jin 金

Jinsha 金沙

Jinuo 基诺

Kengtung เที่ยงตุง

Kuomintang, Guomindang 国民党

Lahu 拉祜

Lan Sang ລ້ານຊ້າງ

Lanna อาณาจักรล้านนา

Lao ລາວ

Li Daoyuan 酈道元

Liang 梁

Lingnan 岭南

Lishuai 李帅

Liu-Song 刘宋

Lue 略

Kunming 昆明

Ma 马

Man shu 蛮书

Mao Zedong 毛泽东

Meng 蒙

Mongmao, Luchuan 麓川

Miao 苗

Ming 明

Minzu 民族

Mu 木

Nanjing 南京

Nanzhao 南诏

nanzhong daxing 南中大姓

Nong 侗

Nong Zhigao 侗智高

Pu Han 铺汉

Qi 齐

Qianlong 乾隆

Shan 掸

Shu 蜀

*Shui jing zhu* 水经注

Sichuan 四川

Sima Qian 司马迁

Sipsongpanna 西双版纳州

Song 宋

Sui 随

Tai 泰

Taiping 太平

Tang 唐

Tianxia 天下

Tubo 图伯

tusi 土司

Wa 佤

Wu Sangui 吴三桂

xinan yi 西南夷

*xuanweisi* 宣慰司

Yangzi 揚子

Yan'an 延安

*yishuai* 夷帅

Yizhou 宜州

Yongzheng 雍正

Yuan 元

Yao 瑶

Yue 越

Yunnan 雲南

Zhang Shengwen 张胜温

Zhou Qufei 周去非

Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮